

Chapter VIII

PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND GRANDCHILDREN

I

512 **WE** WERE aroused early after our night of stories. The women were moving about, getting their morning meal before daybreak came to give them light for their harvesting. There was much they had to do.

Late that afternoon they would be returning to their villages, for the next day was sacred to the Earth Mother, and no work could be done in the fields. Today, added to the round of harvesting were the preparations for the return to their village. The rice that had been cut during the week would have to be carried there for drying and winnowing, and yams and peanuts and beans were to be brought in.

136 Not far off, in the bush, the "baboons" were crying. We had been told how these howling monkeys lived in bands, and how they had an "old man" for leader. Their strange cries, ringing through the forest, sounded like despair made articulate. A terribly moving reiteration of four or five wailing notes went on and on, rising slowly in volume, until their cries blotted out all other sounds, and then, like a wave receding, diminishing until quiet reigned again. But when we had given up listening for its distant echo, there it was again, filling the darkness of the clearing with despair, until, at its very height, we heard the low, penetrating grunts of their "G'aman—Chief" and instantly all was still. They were done for the night. With daylight, they would go deeper into the bush.

Djuka

123 /3 cont./
675 request the captain residing there, Kwassi jenni, to man all the
[501] available korjalen (3) and to send them around to the camps of

3. Small vessels made out of tree trunks.

the Bush Negroes, in order to notify all the Aukaners /Aucaners/
/4/ in that district that I, sojourning entirely by myself among
them, wished to see them all together so as to have the opportunity,
in the place to be determined by them and in accordance with
their manner and customs, to take the oath of agreement to re-
main at all times faithful to one another.

Three days were spent in deliberations and consultations
among various captains, council members, and elders, before
I could succeed in obtaining their consent for this.

• [527] Finally, however, it was decided to have the agreement
ceremony take place on Friday (a day that is holy among them),
when the sun reached its midday point.

On this day, around eleven o'clock in the forenoon, one of
the oldest and most influential among them took a clean teacup,
put in it some dram mixed with herbs, and took a few finely
ground plants which he moistened with river water and squeezed
over the cup.

I and seven of the most important people then had three
small slashes cut into the right hand with a razor. The blood
from this, having been taken up with a little flock of cotton,
was also squeezed into the cup, and the cotton washed out with
river water and wrung out so often that no more signs of blood
showed in it. The one and the other having been thoroughly
stirred in the cup, the latter was placed on a stool in the open air.
At twelve o'clock exactly, a great number of men, women, and
children gathered around the stool on which the cup stood, by the
side of which they placed me.

Three gunshots were fired. Among all those present a pro-
found silence reigned, whereupon the cup was offered, first to me
and then to the other seven persons whose blood was mingled with
mine, in order to drink a draught from the contents, whereupon it
had to go around to all the men so that, however little, they would

241 /259 cont. /
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532 Cult of Mama gɔɔ. Mama gɔɔ, mother of the earth, is represented by a crude statue of white clay provided with enormous breasts, symbol of fecundity, which can be seen in a little hut situated on the open place of Boniville village. Each year, when the time for cutting the clearings approaches, the grand man, surrounded by many other people, prays to the god to grant fertility to the plantings. If rain does not fall, an offering of water and tafia is made and the statue is sprinkled.

811 The Boni do not appear to associate the idea of women's fecundity with that of the fertility of the soil, and we have not heard anyone say that the grand man prays on this subject.

241 Neither do they appear to have a very clear idea about the relationships of this worship with that of the gɔɔ gadu, local gods of the soil.
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796 Every three years a great possession dance takes place in Boniville on January 1, /260/ in which the Papa gadu gods dance in front of the sanctuary of Mama gɔɔ. We have not been able to obtain specific information on the meaning of this rite.
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241 Cult of the gɔɔ gadu. It is assumed that every portion of land is under the sway of a local god, gɔɔ gadu. Its power is limited only by the fertility of the soil, and he who neglects its worship cannot be attacked in his person or in his goods, but only punished by a poor harvest.
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[784]

What is the nature of these gods, what is their place in the cosmogony? These are questions which not one of our informants had ever asked himself. In their minds, gɔɔ gadu has a de facto existence, and is rendered de facto worship.

This worship consists essentially of:

[782] --Offerings made at the moment of planting;

[527] --The observance of a local day of rest, kina dɛ,

corresponding to the god's day of rest.

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776 /260 cont. /

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776 In order to observe these rites suitably, it is important
529 then to know in which god's domain are situated the lands
one is cultivating. On the banks of the great river, the di-
vision of the lands among the gods of the soil has been well
known since the time of the ancestors. By summarizing the
kina dɛ of the farming habitations, one realizes that the do-
main of each god is extensive; it occupies several kilometers
along the banks. It is often thought (but not everywhere) that
the two banks are controlled by different gods. For example:

Downstream from Boniville, right bank: Wednesday;

Toward Kormotibo, right bank: Thursday;

Toward the mouth of the Inini, both banks: Wednesday;

Toward Simayé Falls, both banks: Saturday.

On those days one may do nothing related to agriculture,
and in particular one may not dig in the earth nor plant.
If absolutely necessary one may go to pull up tubercules.

What one must avoid above all is handling tools which
make noise and could disturb the god, except in the immediate
vicinity of the water which is not under its control. However,
one may shoot off a gun.

This kina dɛ is observed more strictly than Friday, the
general kina dɛ in Boni country, which appears to be related
to the cult of Mama gɔɔ. On those days people mend boats
and especially go hunting and fishing.

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778 Offerings are made in a purely individual and local
fashion; in each farming habitation is seen at the approaches
to the wharf a worship place formed by a simple meat-drying
rack decorated with pennants of several colors, on which the
offerings are exposed; even if this habitation combines people
of diverse kin groups, there is only one place of worship.